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Annual report for 2014 on the evaluation function in UNICEF

Summary

In accordance with Executive Board decisions 2014/10, 2013/13, and 2012/12, the present report provides an overview of the status of the evaluation function of UNICEF in 2014 and reports on progress in implementing the revised evaluation policy.

A draft decision is included in section IX.

* E/ICEF/2015/4.



I. Introduction

1. At its annual session of 2013, in decision 2013/13, the Executive Board approved the revised evaluation policy of UNICEF (E/ICEF/2013/14), which reaffirmed "the organization's commitment to demonstrate results, transparency and accountability through an independent and credible evaluation system, [which] supports the mission, mandate and strategic priorities of UNICEF".¹ A robust evaluation function supports organizational learning and accountability and thereby helps UNICEF to document and constantly improve its performance and results.

2. The present report provides an overview of the status of the evaluation function at UNICEF in 2014 and reports on progress in implementing the revised evaluation policy. It considers the governance of the function, outlines UNICEF efforts to promote evaluation coherence within the United Nations system and more widely and reports on the performance and results of the function across UNICEF. It also covers action taken to respond to decisions of the Executive Board and reviews the utilization of evaluation evidence in UNICEF.

II. Governance of the evaluation function

3. The Executive Board exercises oversight of the evaluation function in UNICEF, upholding its central role in UNICEF.

4. At its annual session of 2014, Executive Board members considered the annual report for 2013 on the evaluation function, submitted by the Evaluation Office. For the first time, at the request of the Executive Board in its decision 2013/13, the annual report was accompanied by a paper prepared by management setting out the management perspective on the material presented in the annual report.

5. At its first regular session of 2014, the Executive Board also welcomed the Plan for Global Thematic Evaluations, 2014-2017 (E/ICEF/2014/3). An update on implementation of the plan, as requested by the Executive Board in its decision 2014/10, is provided in section V. Three global thematic evaluations were considered by the Executive Board in the course of the year, addressing, in turn, community management of acute malnutrition, the UNICEF cluster lead agency role in humanitarian action, and UNICEF support for protection of children in emergencies. A thematic evaluation synthesis report drawing together learning from evaluations of nutrition programmes was also considered. Each report was supplemented by a formal management response.

6. The internal UNICEF Evaluation Committee met in September, when it endorsed Standard Operating Procedures intended to clarify responsibilities for responding to global thematic evaluation reports; provided guidance on the preparation of an action plan to strengthen the evaluation function in UNICEF; and took note of levels of expenditure on evaluation, as recorded in VISION.

7. The external Audit Advisory Committee keeps the evaluation function in view, considering evaluation to be an important organizational control. In its report to the Executive Board,² the Committee recorded its satisfaction with measures to

¹ E/ICEF/2013/14.

² UNICEF Audit Advisory Committee, 2013 annual report (28 February 2014).

strengthen the independence of the Evaluation Office introduced in the revised evaluation policy.

8. The UNICEF evaluation function was reviewed in 2014 by the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU), as part of a review of evaluation functions across the United Nations system (JIU/REP/2014/6). The favourable review found the UNICEF evaluation function to be well developed, while noting some areas for improvement (see section V).

III. Evaluation coherence within the United Nations system

A. Decisions of the United Nations General Assembly

9. In recent years, evaluation has received increased attention from United Nations Member States. The United Nations General Assembly resolution on the quadrennial comprehensive policy review (QCPR)³ emphasized the importance of evaluation and the use of evaluation evidence, and called for effective arrangements for independent system-wide evaluation (ISWE). To guide efforts on ISWE, an Interim Coordination Mechanism was set up and a policy on ISWE was adopted.⁴ Terms of Reference for two pilot evaluations have been developed and efforts made to mobilize resources, with a view to undertaking the evaluations in 2015. Throughout, UNICEF has provided advice and assistance in support of the initiative.

10. In December 2014, for the first time, the General Assembly approved a resolution specifically on evaluation. Resolution 69/237 invites United Nations entities "to support, upon request, efforts to further strengthen the capacity of Member States for evaluation in accordance with their national policies and priorities".⁵ Activities will be reported in 2016 within the Secretary-General's progress report on the QCPR.

B. United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG)

11. UNEG is a professional network comprising the evaluation units of organizations across the United Nations system. It has supported system-wide evaluation coherence by developing common norms and standards for use across the United Nations, as well as developing and sharing tools and guidance. In 2013, UNEG adopted a new strategy with a stronger emphasis on advocacy and outreach, including closer engagement with the Evaluation Network of the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and the Evaluation Coordination Group of the international development banks.⁶ This shift in orientation was reflected in the Evaluation Week held in Bangkok in March 2014, organized jointly by UNEG and a regional evaluation network, the United Nations Evaluation Development Group for Asia and

³ A/RES/67/226 of 21 December 2012.

⁴ Policy for Independent System-wide Evaluation of Operational Activities for Development of the United Nations System (14 June 2013). See: A/68/658-E/2014/7.

⁵ General Assembly resolution 69/237 of 19 December 2014, on building capacity for the evaluation of development activities at the country level.

⁶ UNEG Strategy, 2014-2019.

the Pacific. Activities during the week brought together senior United Nations officials, diplomats, academics and parliamentarians from the region for discussions on evaluation issues. UNICEF played a major role through its East Asia and Pacific Regional Office in arranging and hosting the Evaluation Week, and provided substantive input to the Evaluation Practice Exchange among UNEG evaluation professionals.

12. UNEG also convened several seminars and side events held in New York and supported the process leading to adoption of the General Assembly resolution on evaluation capacity-building noted above. UNEG is also a member of the ISWE Interim Coordination Mechanism.

13. Peer reviews can be a powerful mechanism for promoting adherence to agreed norms and standards. In recent years, UNEG has undertaken a series of peer reviews among its members, with support from the Evaluation Network of the Development Assistance Committee.⁷ The Executive Director of the World Food Programme (WFP) invited UNEG to undertake such a peer review. Chaired by the Director of the UNICEF Evaluation Office, the peer review was begun in 2013 and successfully completed in 2014 with the presentation to the WFP Executive Board of the final report and the formal WFP management response.

14. Overall, UNEG is an important channel for enhancing the coherence of evaluation across the United Nations. Recognizing this, UNICEF continues to support UNEG and lead various activities.

C. Joint evaluations

15. Joint evaluations provide a practical vehicle for considering system-wide issues and aligning evaluation practices. The Evaluation Office engaged in several joint evaluation activities in 2014:

(a) **Joint Evaluation of Joint Programmes on Gender Equality in the United Nations System:** At their annual sessions of 2014, Members of the Executive Boards of the respective agencies were briefed on the results of this evaluation and on the joint management response prepared by the agencies. As noted in the annual report for 2013 on the evaluation function (E/ICEF/2014/12), the evaluation has yielded valuable lessons to improve the design and implementation of future joint gender programmes;

(b) **Inter-agency Evaluation of the United Nations response to Typhoon Haiyan:** The Inter-agency Humanitarian Evaluation Group undertakes joint evaluations of the United Nations response to humanitarian emergencies. The joint evaluation of the Typhoon Haiyan emergency response found that the initial inter-agency efforts were relevant and timely and contributed effectively towards meeting emergency needs, while noting that communities were dissatisfied with the beneficiary targeting systems used by agencies.⁸ The report recognized the key role of the Government of the Philippines, with its established and experienced national

⁷ The Development Assistance Committee is a committee of members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

⁸ Valid International (October 2014) *Interagency Humanitarian Evaluation of the Typhoon Haiyan Response*. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) is coordinating preparation of a formal management response.

disaster-management system as well as the important self-help role played by the Filipino people themselves in the affected areas;

(c) **Crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic and neighbouring countries (Syrian crisis):** The Inter-agency Humanitarian Evaluation group also organized an initiative to share information from evaluations of the humanitarian response to the Syrian crisis.⁹ A web portal was established and a briefing paper commissioned to promote understanding of the subregional context and guide evaluation efforts.¹⁰

16. Several joint evaluations are planned for 2015, notably inter-agency evaluations of the United Nations response to emergencies in the Central African Republic and South Sudan, as well as an inter-agency evaluation on nutrition (see annex).

IV. UNICEF support to evaluation coherence and collaboration at the global level

17. UNICEF continued to assist with the governance and coordination of EvalPartners, a rapidly growing network of national, regional and global evaluation associations and other partners, which is building up an impressive track record of support for various activities related to national evaluation capacity development.

18. UNICEF also engaged closely with ALNAP, a network supporting learning from evaluations and other efforts to strengthen humanitarian action. A key activity has been the development of an e-learning programme on how to undertake evaluation of humanitarian action, which was launched early in 2015.

19. At the suggestion of its members, EvalPartners launched efforts to declare 2015 an International Year of Evaluation, to be marked by a series of events around the globe promoting evaluation and the use of evaluation evidence to inform decision-making. For example, UNEG plans to hold an Evaluation Week in New York, featuring a high-level forum. General Assembly resolution 69/237, on evaluation, recognized the International Year of Evaluation as an opportunity to mobilize support for national evaluation capacity development.

V. The evaluation function in UNICEF: performance and results

Introduction

20. This section (a) reports on the findings from the review by the JIU on the status of the evaluation function across the United Nations system, and (b) provides an analysis of key performance data from internal UNICEF sources.

⁹ This initiative has been undertaken jointly with the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP), whose members come from a wide range of agencies involved in humanitarian action, including United Nations agencies.

¹⁰ See Slim, H. and Trombetta, L. (2014), *Syria Common Context Analysis. Coordinated Accountability and Lessons learning (CALL) Initiative*. IASC Inter-agency Humanitarian Evaluation Steering Group.

A. JIU analysis of the evaluation function in the United Nations system (JIU/REP/2014/6)

21. The JIU 2014 analysis was intended to support the professionalization of the evaluation function, address emerging challenges and contribute to strengthening the United Nations system.¹¹

22. The study assessed 28 organizations, focusing mainly on the central evaluation function while also reviewing the decentralized function where relevant. Using a well-developed analytical framework, the study considered: (a) the enabling environment; (b) independence and credibility; (c) quality; (d) utility; and (e) relevance.

23. The study categorized organizations into four clusters in terms of their maturity. UNICEF falls within Cluster I, where most of the expected systems and policies supporting the central evaluation function are in place and well institutionalized. The other Cluster I organizations are the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), International Labour Organization, WFP, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), United Nations Industrial Development Organization, United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. The main challenge for these organizations, which are mainly relatively large entities, is to strengthen the use and impact of evaluation products and manage the increasing demands on the function.

24. Regarding decentralized evaluation, UNICEF, along with UNDP, UNFPA and UN-Women, was found to have pertinent standards, guidance and operational procedures for decentralized evaluations as well as systems for quality assurance and tracking of implementation.

25. The JIU review concluded that the evaluation function needs to be strengthened across all United Nations agencies, especially regarding the use of evaluation evidence. However, it found that UNICEF has a mature and high-performing evaluation function that is well supported at decentralized levels. UNICEF is one of only three agencies actively supporting national evaluation capacity development. This confirms the generally positive profile presented in recent UNICEF annual reports on the evaluation function, while serving as a reminder that further improvement is needed.

B. The evaluation function in UNICEF: key performance information and analysis

26. The information reported in this section mainly derives from the Global Evaluation Reports Oversight System (GEROS). This system provides for independent assessment and rating of reports on country, regional and global evaluations; feedback on the quality of reports to offices; and compilation of performance information into a management information dashboard. GEROS quality ratings are based on careful, systematic assessments made by external reviewers using criteria based on UNEG standards.

¹¹ Analysis of the Evaluation Function in the United Nations System, 2014, p. iii.

27. Geros now functions well, and the Evaluation Office continues to update and strengthen it. In 2014, provision was made for easier updating of certain information, and the database within the system was expanded to cover research reports. It is anticipated that the database will grow further to include all studies as it transitions to a comprehensive repository of all major sources of evidence, except for statistical data, which is managed separately.

28. Further innovations may be noted:

(a) In June 2014, UNICEF launched live, real-time monitoring of many of the variables referenced in the present report. This allows more proactive management of issues;

(b) A software platform used in the planning phase for all research, studies, and evaluations was piloted, and will enable greater quality assurance oversight earlier in the process by regional offices and others. This system will expand to several regions in 2015;

(c) The initiation of costed evaluation plans as part of country programme submissions to the Executive Board will likewise allow more proactive quality assurance and transparency;

(d) Finally, UNICEF is preparing to conduct a review of the Geros system in 2015. After five years of implementation, a review may identify changes for greater speed, accuracy, quality, and use.

C. Overview

29. A suite of seven key performance indicators (KPIs) provides a general overview of performance in 2014, supplemented by trend information from previous years. Four major conclusions are warranted:

(a) Evaluation quality continued the move first seen in 2013 towards a sustained high percentage of good/excellent evaluations. These quality improvements have occurred together with continued high performance in focusing on higher-level results, and in the preparation of management responses;

(b) UNICEF routinely monitors certain elements of evaluation practice, namely, the appropriate consideration in evaluation reports of human rights, gender and equity issues; of engagement of stakeholders in ways suited to their capacities and interests; and of ethical issues. Over the past several years, evaluation performance in these areas has been weak. It remains to be determined whether this represents reporting deficits or reflects deficiencies in actual practice;

(c) Budget use can now be tracked through VISION. For 2014, the data show that UNICEF commits 0.5 per cent of its programming funds to evaluation, compared to the 1 per cent called for in the evaluation policy. This is a welcome increase compared to the level of 0.33 per cent recorded in 2011;

(d) The execution of the 2014-2017 plan for global thematic evaluations commissioned by the Evaluation Office has started slowly.

D. Performance against key performance indicators

Indicator 1: Number of evaluations managed and submitted to the global evaluation database

30. In 2013, UNICEF offices completed and submitted 96 evaluations, the number having risen significantly from the 79 submitted in 2012. In this as in other KPIs, the data refer to evaluations completed and submitted in 2013 as the most recent year for which data and analysis are available. Evaluations are generally submitted after the year end, and the analysis of evaluations completed in 2014 is not available for this report.

31. The Executive Board has asked for more information on coverage (decision 2014/10). Globally, 75 per cent of countries have completed at least one evaluation in the past three years. In 2013, productivity by region varied from a low of 4 evaluations submitted in one region to as many as 25 in another. UNICEF is currently considering how best to set expectations for evaluation coverage and numbers, taking account of variations in regional contexts and using the criteria set out in the revised evaluation policy, i.e., programme expenditure, scaling up, humanitarian context, and recent evaluation activity. Some KPIs described below expand on additional aspects of coverage. A deeper analysis of overall and regional productivity will inform future reports.

Indicator 2: Topical distribution

32. For 2013, a breakdown shows that, over four years, the percentage of evaluations dealing with just a single sector can vary widely, compared with other topical emphases such as multisectoral evaluations (table 1). The new and notable growth in the relative volume of evaluations on child survival and development is almost entirely due to a recent major expansion in evaluations on nutrition. Growth in one area is matched by a simultaneous decline in others, most notably in education in recent years. While this may reflect a limit on how many evaluations each office can do, it also shows a welcome flexibility in terms of redirecting limited evaluation resources to themes of growing interest, such as nutrition, to which the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) initiative and other programmes have drawn attention in recent years.

Table 1
Topical distribution of evaluation reports, 2010-2013, by percentage

Topic	2010 (baseline)	2011	2012*	2013
Sector specific (by key results area of the UNICEF medium-term strategic plan)	66	55	41	59
Child survival and development (health, nutrition, and water, sanitation and hygiene [WASH])	25	13	26	31
Education and gender	15	25	13	11
Child protection	15	10	8	11
HIV/AIDS	10	4	5	3
Policy advocacy and partnerships	1	4	1	1

Topic	2010 (baseline)	2011	2012*	2013
Programmes covering several sectors	34	25	43	28
Cross-cutting themes	–	20	10	10
Organizational performance	–	–	6	3

Source: GEROS reports, 2011-2014.

* This 2012 data was erroneously reported as 2013 data in the 2014 report to the Executive Board. This column now represents the correct year and figures. Similar errors in two other KPIs have also been rectified in this report.

Indicator 3: Types of evaluations conducted

33. The percentage of evaluations looking primarily at the output level continues to decline, as desired. Evaluations should focus on higher-level, more complex results. Output-level concerns should be served by monitoring and review processes.

34. The percentage of formative evaluations — those conducted early in the programme cycle to assess whether implementation is unfolding satisfactorily — continued the sharp decline first noted for 2012 (table 2). This suggests that multidimensional and real-time programme monitoring is beginning to provide much richer data for managers than conventional programme monitoring, thereby reducing the demand for formative and output-level evaluations.

Table 2

Types of evaluations conducted, by percentage, 2009-2012

	2009	2011	2012	2013
<i>By programmatic results level examined*</i>				
Output-level evaluations	33	27	18	8
Outcome-level evaluations	24	46	30	65
Impact-level evaluations	43	27	52	27
<i>By managerial intent*</i>				
Formative-level evaluations	45	59	24	29
Summative-level evaluations	55	41	76	71

* Summative evaluations normally also have some formative elements as well, and impact-level evaluations may also look at output-level issues. This table records solely their primary purpose.

Indicator 4: Quality of UNICEF evaluations

35. Of all the key performance indicators, the quality ratings have been the most variable from year to year (table 3). The 2013 data show two welcome movements: to the highest-ever level of satisfactory/excellent ratings; and to the lowest level of poor ratings. This is the second consecutive year of excellent results and, if it persists for another year, UNICEF can be confident that this improvement is sustainable. Progress may be attributable to the gradual absorption of advice provided to staff and to increased attention to evaluation by managers.

Table 3
Quality of completed evaluations, by percentage, 2009-2013

	2009	2011	2012	2013
<i>Quality rating</i>				
Confident to act (<i>good or excellent</i>)	36	42	62	69
Almost confident to act (<i>almost satisfactory</i>) ¹²	34	35	30	29
Poor	30	23	8	2

36. The overall quality rating is a synthesis of many specific ratings (table 4). Several of these indicate the extent of mainstreaming of corporate commitments. Regarding the engagement of all stakeholders in ways suited to their capacities and interests, a negative pattern is appearing: the percentage is regressing toward the 2010 baseline from the highest rate attained in 2011.

37. Another important area concerns gender equality. In 2012, the United Nations adopted a System-wide Action Plan (SWAP) on gender equality and the empowerment of women, comprising a set of standards by which to measure gender integration and mainstreaming in the work of the United Nations system. The new policy tasked United Nations agencies to consider six distinct elements in the promotion of gender and empowerment, of which evaluation was one. In 2014, UNICEF assessed its 2013 evaluations using the SWAP standards, aiming at compliance with the system-wide gender mainstreaming standards. The results were used to report to the Economic and Social Council on the extent to which gender is mainstreamed in UNICEF evaluations, as well as to help to identify key areas for improvement in years to come. This first cycle of SWAP analyses marked an important step in measuring commitment to gender equality in programming and evaluation within UNICEF and more widely across the United Nations system. Overall, UNICEF was scored as “approaching requirements”: 60 per cent of evaluations were rated as “approaching requirements”, 35 per cent as “missing the requirements” and only 5 per cent as “meeting the requirements” of the SWAP.

38. Taking human rights, gender and equity concerns together, the GEROS ratings provide an indication of a positive trend, but there is clearly much room for improvement.

¹² “Almost confident to act” is selected when the report content appears to be accurate and the evaluation was correctly managed, but there is some shortcoming that prevents having full confidence. The problem is often under-description in the report, or a weakness in a small portion of the effort within a generally good larger approach.

Table 4
Mainstreaming of selected corporate emphases in completed evaluations,
2010-2012

<i>Corporate emphasis*</i>	<i>Percentage of reports attaining a "good" or "excellent" rating</i>			
	<i>2010</i>	<i>2011</i>	<i>2012</i>	<i>2013**</i>
Appropriate incorporation of human rights, gender and equity concerns	18	33	44	47
Engagement of all stakeholders in ways suited to their capacities and interests	40	52	48	42
Ethical issues and considerations described, and the appropriate ethical safeguards, described	10	22	32	38

* Drawn from among the elements analysed in each report, based on the UNEG quality standards for evaluations.

** 2013 data is from Geros report table 5.25.

39. Ethics is an important consideration in evaluation. For the first time, this report notes the ratings for ethics, as assessed through Geros. The findings reveal that the majority (62 per cent) of the reports completed in 2013 did not address ethics at all or did so only superficially. While this marks an improvement from 2010, when 82 per cent of reports made no reference to ethics, further efforts are required in this area. UNICEF has now issued a formal Procedure on Research Ethics, which is expected to guide attention to ethical considerations in evaluation and research.

Indicator 5: Use of evaluation, including management responses

40. Evaluation is an investment. As evaluation quality has improved, there is every reason to capitalize on time and funds invested in evaluation by making effective use of the results. The UNICEF evaluation policy requires a formal management response for each evaluation, translating evaluation recommendations into agreed actions.

41. Management responses are required to be submitted to a corporate database. The submission rate reached 92 per cent in 2013 from the 2009 baseline of 10 per cent. Advocacy, training and oversight have together resulted in rapid improvements. Implementation of agreed actions (including actions completed and ongoing) increased from 57 per cent in 2010 to consistently around 80 per cent. Further efforts will be made to prompt compliance where implementation of agreed actions are lagging. A study looking at all aspects of the management response mechanism and the use of evaluations is under preparation.

Indicator 6: Corporate spending on evaluation

42. Corporate spending on evaluation was a KPI through 2011, when a changeover in UNICEF internal systems led to data becoming non-comparable. A further systems change was introduced with the Strategic Plan, 2014-2017, allowing reporting on this KPI, as requested by the Executive Board in its decision 2013/13.

43. The 2014 data show that a total of \$18.7 million dollars was spent or committed to evaluation by end-December 2014, within a corporate programming budget of \$4.1 billion. In other words, 0.5 per cent of the UNICEF programme budget expenditures were devoted to evaluation. The Latin American and Caribbean region was the regional leader, at 1.4 per cent. The expenditure level of 0.5 per cent of programme expenditure is a 50 per cent increase from the level recorded in 2007-2010 (annual average of 0.33 per cent). However, the revised evaluation policy sets the figure of 1 per cent as the minimum level for spending on evaluation as a percentage of programme expenditure. By this policy norm, UNICEF is under-spending programme resources on evaluation. Given that offices have had only a short time to adjust their plans in the light of the new policy, the 2014 data can be considered to indicate a positive start.

Indicator 7: Corporate-level evaluations¹³

44. The schedule of corporate-level evaluations to be managed by the Evaluation Office is presented to the Executive Board prior to the start of the UNICEF strategic plan for that period, and is revised on a rolling basis to account for emerging priorities. The 2104-2017 Plan for Global Thematic Evaluations is closely aligned with the UNICEF Strategic Plan, 2014-2017.

45. Table 5 shows implementation of corporate evaluations over the 2012-2013 biennium, and in the first two years of the 2014-2017 Strategic Plan. Further details of implementation appear in the annex, and a summary of results is available on the evaluation web pages of the UNICEF website, along with the completed evaluations.¹⁴

Table 5
Implementation of corporate evaluations: status at 31 December 2014

Plan status	2012-2013		2014-2015	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Scheduled	14	—	12	—
Completed	7	50	0	0
Under implementation	0	0	6	50
Pending	0	0	5	42
Rescheduled*	6	43	0	0
Cancelled/modified	1	7	1	8

* All items rescheduled from 2012-2013 have been placed into the 2014-2017 evaluation plan.

46. Evaluations carried forward from the 2012-2013 corporate evaluation plan and completed in 2014 were on the following subjects:

- (a) Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys;

¹³ Corporate-level evaluations for present purposes are those commissioned and managed by the Evaluation Office.

¹⁴ www.unicef.org/evaluation.

- (b) Formative evaluation of the Monitoring Results for Equity System (MoRES), including seven country case studies;
- (c) Cluster lead agency role in humanitarian action;
- (d) Child protection in emergencies, including four country case studies;
- (e) Community approaches to total sanitation;
- (f) Emergency preparedness systems;
- (g) Upstream work in the education sector, including four country case studies.

47. The real-time evaluation of the UNICEF response to the Typhoon Haiyan emergency in the Philippines was completed in 2014, as noted above. Preparatory work was also undertaken for evaluation of the UNICEF response to other major emergencies, including the Syrian crisis (for which a scoping visit was completed) and in the Central African Republic (where an evaluation was launched at the beginning of 2015). Given the unpredictability of humanitarian emergencies, the plan for global thematic evaluations for 2014-2017 did not list evaluations of specific emergencies. Nonetheless, the unexpected increase in the number and scale of major humanitarian emergencies over the past two years has demanded significantly increased evaluation effort.

48. In addition, several joint evaluations were completed (see section III above), and preparations have been made for inter-agency evaluations to be undertaken in the Central African Republic and South Sudan in 2015.

49. Several evaluations from the 2014-2017 corporate evaluation plan were launched but not yet completed by the end of 2014, including evaluations on violence against children, on the evaluability of the Strategic Plan and on education and peacebuilding. Methodological work on innovation was also initiated. The evaluation synthesis study on nutrition was completed and presented to the Executive Board at its second regular session of 2014.

50. Corporate evaluation plans have been ambitious. Although completed evaluations are generally rated as being relevant and of high quality, delivery has generally been behind schedule, constrained by the complexity and scale of some evaluations. For example, the MoRES evaluation included preparation of seven detailed country case studies in addition to the main report. Furthermore, new or complex areas of work have required careful scoping. For example, an in-depth scoping exercise was undertaken to prepare for the upstream education evaluation. The adoption of simpler or less extensive evaluation designs will help to accelerate delivery.

51. Staffing gaps in 2014 also led to delays, notably regarding evaluation of humanitarian interventions. Steps have been taken to bolster staffing in the Evaluation Office in 2015. A Senior Evaluation Specialist covering humanitarian action was recruited in 2014; an evaluation specialist covering the water sector was appointed; and several temporary appointments will strengthen the capacity of the office to address subject areas, including health, HIV/AIDS and early childhood development.

52. The annex provides a list of the topics for 2015. While this is an ambitious agenda, increased staffing is expected to enable more timely delivery.

VI. Response to Executive Board guidance on evaluation

53. The annual report on the evaluation function periodically provides data on requests made by the Executive Board, including through decisions and their implementation. For the first time, in the present report, a comprehensive overview is provided of decisions and actions taken from 2011 to 2013 (table 6). Other Executive Board comments such as “notes” or “encourages” are not included, as it is understood that only ‘requests’ establish an expectation of action.

54. Themes recur from year to year, and this section groups similar Executive Board requests into five categories. Against each request, a status note is offered, using the following key:

- (a) **Completed:** All follow-up actions concluded; no additional effort needed
- (b) **Developed/sustained:** Response successfully developed; efforts are ongoing to sustain the success
- (c) **Underway:** Action is being taken to respond to the request, and no obstacles have emerged
- (d) **Pending:** Planning is underway, but implementation has not yet begun
- (e) **Constrained:** Obstacles have so far held back action.

Table 6

Theme: Independence, governance, and strategic vision of the evaluation function			
Short title	Executive Board request	Decision and para. Number	Status at December 2014
Board Dialogue	A dialogue between the Executive Board and UNICEF on the independence of the Evaluation Office, including budget arrangements	2011/20:10	Completed
Review the function	Review of the evaluation function and evaluation policy	2012/12:8a	Completed
Updated policy	Present an updated evaluation policy to the Board in 2013	2012/12:8a	Completed
Resource allocation	UNICEF to allocate sufficient resources to the Evaluation Office in a separate budget line in the UNICEF integrated budget, 2014-2017	2013/13:11	Developed/ Sustained
Expenditure-tracking	UNICEF to track expenditure for decentralized evaluations	2013/13:12	Developed/ Sustained

55. UNICEF has completed all the actions requested, and UNICEF management has met several times with Executive Board representatives on these issues. At its

annual session of 2013, the Executive Board reviewed and approved the revised evaluation policy, which drew on comments from several reviews by the Executive Board. The 2014-2017 budget of the Evaluation Office doubled the core resources available, and Evaluation is now a function that receives priority attention when thematic funds are allocated. Finally, the present report on 2014 includes the expenditure-tracking information following a redesign of the UNICEF financial coding system.

Table 7

Theme: Humanitarian evaluations			
Short title	Executive Board request	Decision and para. number	Status at December 2014
Humanitarian coverage	Address 'key gaps' in the evaluation coverage of humanitarian interventions	2013/13:12	Underway
Evaluation quality	Continue to improve the quality of evaluations in the humanitarian field	2013/13:19	Underway

56. The Executive Board made these requests at its annual session in June 2013, following its consideration of the thematic synthesis report on evaluation of humanitarian action. UNICEF actions in response are underway. Additional capacity has been hired within the Evaluation Office to increase humanitarian coverage, and clearer rules now guide evaluation efforts in major emergencies. Training and support for evaluation of lesser emergencies where the evaluation duties remain with the field offices were prepared in 2014 for roll-out in 2015, linked to an e-training programme for evaluation in emergencies. The results of these efforts on quality and coverage should be clearer in 2016 and 2017.

Table 8

Theme: Coordination with national partners; capacity building of partners			
Short Title	Executive Board request	Decision and para. number	Status at December 2014
Government consultation	Conduct evaluations at the country level in close consultation with government and other national partners	2013/13:13	Underway
National capacities	As appropriate, assist governments and partners in the development of national evaluation capacities	2013/13:13	Underway

57. UNICEF has usually conducted evaluations in close consultation with national stakeholders, and will continue to do so.

58. Concerning building capacity for national evaluation, UNICEF is a major actor, as described in depth in previous annual reports. UNICEF works in this field with partners, such as the EvalPartners global network and other United Nations agencies. In 2014, this theme achieved much higher visibility through General Assembly resolution 69/237. UNICEF stands ready to receive requests for assistance in this area from national partners and will work jointly with other United Nations agencies in support of this resolution. UNICEF is also supporting sector specific-strategies, such as that for WASH whereby UNICEF and the Department for International Development of the United Kingdom are strengthening national WASH monitoring and evaluation capacity as an element of their joint efforts.

Table 9

Theme: management responses and utilization			
Short title	Executive Board request	Decision and para. number	Status at December 2014
Coverage	Ensure management responses are prepared to address all evaluation recommendations	2011/20:8a 2012/12:7	Developed/sustained
Implementation	Ensure implementation of agreed actions	2011/20:8a	Constrained
Usage	Ensure that relevant results are systematically considered and used in preparing key policies, strategies, and programmes	2011/20:8c 2012/12:8c	Underway
Timeliness	Ensure the timeliness of management responses	2013/13:12	Underway

59. As noted in the KPIs, most UNICEF evaluations are matched by a management response, and the great majority of agreed actions are begun. Recently, Standard Operating Procedures for global thematic evaluations have been issued to clarify roles and responsibilities in the concluding stages of an evaluation.

60. Nonetheless, experience in the field indicates that some complexities remain, including the following:

- (a) The need to improve the clarity and quality of evaluation recommendations;
- (b) The need to prioritize recommendations when an overly long list of them is presented;
- (c) Mobilizing managers to implement agreed recommendations;
- (d) Extracting lessons from a broad range of evaluations in a timely way to influence policy and programme design and implementation;
- (e) Coordinating management responses with review moments and advocacy opportunities.

61. UNICEF is well aware of the importance of management responses, and will continue to strengthen guidance and support, to monitor progress and to report the relevant data.

Table 10

Theme: Reporting to the Executive Board			
Short title	Executive Board request	Decision and para. number	Status at December 2014
Management responses	Report on progress in the implementation of management responses including how they help UNICEF offices to report more transparently to partners and host governments	2011/20:8(b) 2012/12:7	Pending
Respond to thematic analysis	Prepare a succinct management response to the thematic analysis section of the annual report on the evaluation function	2011/20:9	Developed/ sustained
Two annual reports	Prepare from 2013 onwards two reports to the Board, on (a) the performance of the function, and (b) lessons on a substantive theme containing findings and their use	2012/12:8b	Developed/ sustained
Management perspective	UNICEF [management] present a written statement with a management perspective on issues raised in the annual report	2013/13:10	Developed/ sustained
Using results	Report on steps taken to ensure relevant results are systematically considered and used in preparing key policies, strategies, and programmes	2013/13:18	Pending
Policy implementation	Report in 2015 on steps taken to implement the revised evaluation policy	2014/10:9	Completed
Thematic evaluations	Report in 2015 on the implementation of the plan for global thematic evaluations 2014-2017	2014/10:9 2014/10:11	Completed
Evaluation coverage	Annually provide an overview of evaluation coverage including coverage by region, theme, and programme expenditure level	2014/10:10	Underway

62. UNICEF has completed the majority of the requested actions, enabling the Executive Board to have ever deeper insights into the evaluation function and, more importantly, into aspects of UNICEF performance. Each year, the Executive Board now receives both a performance report on the evaluation function and a substantive thematic report, with a management perspective and a management response, respectively, on each. The present report gives information on the implementation of the plan for global thematic evaluations and on steps taken to implement the revised evaluation policy. Guidance on evaluation coverage is in preparation, in particular on how to meet policy requirements and on monitoring and reporting. Information on the use of evaluation results in policy, programme design and implementation,

and reporting to governments has been provided anecdotally. However, means are being sought to do this systematically so that an accurate organization-wide portrait can be presented.

63. In summary, UNICEF has been attentive in responding to direction from the Executive Board. Where issues are unresolved, they reflect difficulties in monitoring and measuring, or in assigning action. UNICEF continues to work on these issues and will update the Executive Board on additional developments in future, as well as on actions taken following decisions adopted in 2015 and beyond.

VII. Utilization

64. The Executive Board requested, in paragraph 15 of decision 2013/13, that UNICEF report on steps taken to ensure that relevant results are systematically considered and used in preparing key policies, strategies, and programmes. While there is no comprehensive action plan in place, evaluation utilization has been the subject of considerable reflection in recent years. This section presents preliminary data and analysis as the groundwork for further improvements in evaluation dissemination and usage.

65. In 2012, an indicative baseline was calculated of evaluation usage, based on statements made in the 2011 country office annual reports. The 172 examples given of usage were clustered as follows:

- (a) Evidence-based advocacy: 25 per cent;
- (b) Development/revision of national policies and programmes: 23 per cent;
- (c) Development/revision of country programme strategies and interventions: 15 per cent;
- (d) Assessing new/revised interventions and services: 12 per cent;
- (e) Scaling up/replication and expansion: 10 per cent;
- (f) Action plans: 10 per cent;
- (g) Leveraging resources: 5 per cent.

66. Interestingly, 48 per cent of the utilization examples reported were on a scale much wider than the management of the specific UNICEF-supported programmes that had been evaluated. Reported uses targeted broad national policies or legislative, fiscal, and political action. This indicates intelligent efforts to blend evaluation evidence into broader strategic planning and advocacy efforts. The great majority of the uses for evaluation within country programmes were directed at key decision points, including those related to ways to further develop the programme and to whether pilot programmes should be scaled up in the light of successful results. Confirmation of wise targeting and use comes from utilizing GEROs. The rating for the strategic intent of the evaluation has always been high, reaching 74 per cent in 2013, with "highly satisfactory" (50 per cent) or "excellent" (24 per cent).

67. Whether or not the intended goals in using the evaluations are met or not is a different matter. Anecdotal evidence is provided every year by UNICEF offices. In 2014, for example, cases of clear impact based on evaluation results and clever advocacy was seen in, inter alia, WASH regional supply management (ESAR),

national preschool policy (Georgia), anaemia control (Bhutan), health systems reform (Mauritania), donor portfolios (Colombia), child protection (Egypt), and emergency response (Philippines). The wide range of examples matches the diversity of UNICEF-assisted interventions.

68. These and other examples are often compelling. However, they do not prove that evaluation usage and impact are consistently strong and effective across the organization. In developing a more systematic approach, UNICEF has taken two related avenues:

- (a) Improving the quality of the management responses;
- (b) Promoting uses beyond the specific scope of management responses.

69. The finalization of a management response and the completion of the promised actions are already KPIs. They reveal high initial finalization but inconsistent completion. To understand barriers to achieving maximum impact through management responses, regional chiefs of evaluation were consulted. Their replies cluster round the following issues:

(a) Weaknesses in formulating recommendations: recommendations are often vague, unfocused or not strategic; unrealistic in terms of cost and scope; and too numerous and too detailed;

(b) Lack of stakeholder buy-in: this arises, in large part, where stakeholders have had limited engagement over the course of the evaluation, or because there are disagreements over the best course of action;

(c) Communication gaps: insufficient attention is paid to preparing for an effective management response process in terms of communication (e.g., language choices; and the need for simple briefs and guidance); weak outreach; loss of momentum through delayed attention; poor monitoring and feedback; and misunderstanding of roles;

(d) Overload: limits in the capacity to respond given contextual challenges such as successive emergencies; too many stakeholders with competing agendas; and changes in administrations.

70. These constraints can be overcome, as the positive examples of use and impact have shown. Diverse remedies are required, including enhanced participation of stakeholders (already recognized as a problematic issue in the GEROS reviews), stronger supervision of consultants to improve the quality of recommendations, and stronger internal organization. Only the national contextual issues are substantially beyond the control of UNICEF and its key partners.

71. UNICEF guidance on management responses, which is due for revision, will provide an opportunity to incorporate these insights.

72. Strengthening the management response mechanism is important. However, experience shows that influential evaluations require broader dissemination and dialogue around the issues raised by evaluation results, starting with programme partners but extending more widely. Five related lessons and lines of action stand out:

- (a) Build communication and dissemination into the evaluation process from the onset, with a dedicated budget for communication;

(b) Build stronger alliances with communication colleagues to help enhance the way evaluations results are communicated;

(c) Periodically assess evaluation usage through internal surveys, making this information publicly available;

(d) Implement targeted capacity-strengthening efforts in evaluation utilization via workshops, web seminars, e-learning initiatives, peer support, and other means.

73. Drawing on all these insights, UNICEF is developing a comprehensive approach to the systematic utilization of evaluation, to be launched in 2015. The approach involves, but goes beyond, efforts to strengthen the management response mechanism, emphasizing in particular the wider communication of evaluation results and the use of evaluation evidence to inform policies and interventions.

VIII. Conclusions

74. The present report, drawing on an external assessment as well as data from internal systems, has shown that the evaluation function in UNICEF is operating well at each level and, in general, is continuing to improve year after year. The function has benefited from the sustained attention given evaluation issues by the Executive Board, and UNICEF has responded to direction from the Executive Board.

75. The report has also highlighted a number of areas for improvement. While the quality of evaluation reports has improved overall, gender issues have not yet been given adequate attention within evaluation processes. Expenditure on evaluation appears to be increasing, but there is some way to go to meet the requirements of the revised evaluation policy. Compliance with the requirement to prepare and implement a management response for each evaluation is now high, but it seems clear that the mechanism needs to be further strengthened if the potential benefits of evaluation results are to be fully realized. The report has listed these and other issues, and action is in hand to address many of the shortcomings and limitations and to build on areas of strength.

76. During this Year of Evaluation, it is important to pause and consider the vital role and potential of evaluation. This is especially true in light of General Assembly resolution 69/237, on strengthening national evaluation, and in the context of preparations for the Sustainable Development Goals and a new global development framework. It is evident that in moving forward, national development policies need to be supported by nationally led evaluation processes. Global partnerships and alliances need to find appropriate ways of incorporating evaluation insights and evidence into their processes for governance, learning and improvement. UNICEF and sister United Nations organizations also need to draw on lessons from their experience with evaluation. They must adapt and apply the insights gained to emerging development modalities as a way to support children, their families and their communities in the most efficient, effective and equitable manner possible. In this way, evaluation will help to meet the challenges facing the world in 2015 and beyond.

IX. Draft decision

77. The Executive Board

Takes note of the annual report for 2014 on the evaluation function in UNICEF (E/ICEF/2015/10).

Annex

**Global thematic evaluations
Progress in implementing the 2012-2013 and the 2014-2015 global
plans for thematic evaluations**

Title of global thematic evaluation or other effort ¹⁵	Status at 31 December 2014	Comment
2012-2013 Global Plan for Thematic Evaluations		
1. Multiple indicator cluster surveys	Completed	
2. Formative evaluation of MoRES	Completed	
3. Cluster lead agency role in humanitarian action	Completed	
4. Child protection in emergencies	Completed	
5. Community approaches to total sanitation	Completed	
6. Emergency preparedness systems	Completed	
7. Upstream work in the education sector	Completed	
8. Application of results-based management	Superseded	Evaluability of Strategic Plan exercise deemed more critical.
Items in the 2014-2017 plan scheduled for 2014		
1. Communication for development	Implementation	Reprogrammed from 2012-2013 Launched in February 2015
2. Violence against children	Implementation	Reprogrammed from 2012-2013 Due for completion in Q1 2015
3. Advocacy and policy change	Implementation	Reprogrammed from 2012-2013 Preparatory study under implementation
4. Education: early learning and development standards (ELDS) and school readiness	Implementation	Launched in February 2015
5. Evaluability of the Strategic Plan	Implementation	Completion scheduled for Q2 2015

¹⁵ Items are evaluations unless otherwise indicated. Starting in 2014 efforts other than global evaluations are included in the plan, and are reported in this summary.

6. UNICEF alignment with the Millennium Development Goals	Superseded	A note on lessons learned completed in Q2 2015
7. Syria: Lessons Learned (Evaluation Synthesis)	Pending	Pending completion of major evaluations by UNICEF, the World Food Programme (WFP), and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), expected in 2015
8. Nutrition programming (Evaluation Synthesis)	Completed	
9. Evaluation methods for Innovation (Methodological development)	Implementation	Rescheduled to 2015 (see item 19 below)
Items in the 2014-2017 plan scheduled for 2015		
1. Communication for development	Implementation	Reprogrammed from 2012-2013 Launched in February 2015
2. Violence against children	Implementation	Reprogrammed from 2012-2013 Completion due Q2 2015
3. Advocacy and policy change	Implementation	Reprogrammed from 2012-2013. Preparatory study under implementation. Completion due: Q4 2015
4. Education: early learning and development standards (ELDS) and school readiness	Implementation	Launched in February 2015 Completion due: Q4 2015
5. Education and peacebuilding	Implementation	Completion due: Q3 2105
6. Evaluability of the Strategic Plan	Implementation	Completion due: Q2 2015
7. UNICEF alignment with the Millennium Development Goals	Superseded	A note on lessons learned. Completion due: Q2 2015
8. Evaluation of UNICEF response to emergency and programme strategies in the Central African Republic	Implementation	Completion due: Q2 2015
9. Evaluation of the UNICEF response to the emergency in Syria and the subregion	Implementation	Completion due: Q2 2015
10. Preventing stunting	Pending	Reprogrammed from 2012-2013 Completion due: Q1 2016
11. Partnerships: Implementation of the partnership strategy	Pending	Completion due: Q1 2016
12. Support for national capacity development	Pending	Reprogrammed from 2012-2013 Education will be the sectoral emphasis. Completion due: Q1 2016
13. Health: National health systems-strengthening	Pending	Completion due: Q2 2016

14. WASH: Safe drinking water and hygienic practices	Pending	Reprogrammed to 2016, following completion of a review of evaluation results (item 17 below).
15. Social Protection (Evaluation Synthesis)	Implementation	Reprogrammed from 2012-2013; converted to a synthesis due to amount of available material. Completion due: Q2 2015
16. Syria: Lessons Learned (Evaluation synthesis)	Pending	Joint. Pending completion of major evaluations by UNICEF, WFP, and UNHCR. Completion tbd
17. WASH programming (Evaluation synthesis)	Pending	Completion due: Q3 2015
18. Evaluating Policy (Methodological development)	Pending	Completion due: Q4 2015.
19. Evaluation methods for Innovation (Methodological development)	Implementation	Completion due: Q3 2015
Additional items scheduled for 2015		
20. Evaluation of the UNICEF response to the Syria crisis	Implementation	Completion due: Q3 2015
21. Evaluation of UNICEF response to the emergency in the Central African Republic	Implementation	Completion due: Q2 2015
22. Evaluation of UNICEF response to the Ebola epidemic in West Africa	Pending	Completion due: Q4 2015
23. Joint Evaluation of the Partnership Initiative: Renewed Effort against Child Hunger and Undernutrition (REACH)	Implementation	Completion due Q3 2015
24. Joint evaluation of the UN response to the emergency in the Central African Republic	Implementation	Completion due: Q2 2015
25. Joint evaluation of the UN response to the emergency in South Sudan	Implementation	Completion due: Q3 2015
<i>Implementation:</i> Work underway; analysis in process <i>Completed:</i> Final report delivered; dissemination underway <i>Reprogrammed:</i> Was originally scheduled at a different date <i>Pending:</i> Action yet to begin; will start in the year <i>Superseded:</i> Original emphasis has shifted to a modified, higher priority		